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like Cordovan leather, with rich, strange forms picked out with gold, yet of such gloomy magnificence as makes them seem almost alien in our century. Some are grounds of pale green with broad-disked sun-flowers flaunting over them as if wrought with needle in gold threads. Some are Japanese in design, as

vagrant in form and as decorative in effect as Japanese decorations not born of Japan ever can be. Some are Renaissance, with chubby boys in plump nakedness, looking as if just dropped from some Luca della Robbia plaque, and not yet safe upon terra firma.

With all the conceptions and designs borrowed from all periods of art, the even partial enumeration of which reminds one of a catalogue to the Vatican or Cluny, of course the fact remains that it is not art at all, but what—for want of a more comprehensive term—we may call “artistic mechanism.” It is all the work of machinery; if it were not, only princes and palaces could have it. But the designs

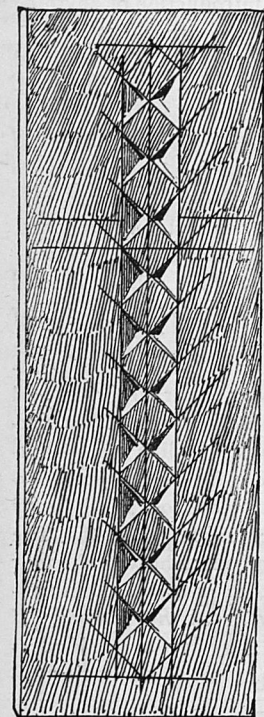


FIG. 1.

are taken from good models of real art, and the colors are chosen and arranged by the well-trained color sense that belongs only to artists.

PRACTICAL WOOD-CARVING FOR AMATEURS.

II.

It is the aim of these papers merely to give in the simplest language possible the same instruction that would be given in a series of first lessons. To become an accomplished wood-carver there is no adequate apprenticeship but that of the shop, under the eye of a master workman; but it is hoped by means of these papers to help to a creditable degree of success in a practical household art the increasing number of amateurs who have no other opportunity of studying it.

Wood-carving, as an art, has its limitations, and one who works long in wood will certainly come to feel them. There is so much confusion of art ideas and art theories at this moment—I am speaking of decorative art and its devotees—that perhaps it will be well in the beginning to put carving in its proper place, to give a general idea of what is and what is not fit work for the chisel, and to save the wood-carver from the blunder that so many china-painters fell into and are just falling out of—that of not preserving the distinction between decoration pure and simple and picture-making.

In the first enthusiasm of your work you will feel that you would like to go on, until you could carve heads of women and faces of angels. But when you have worked a long time, and begin to try figure-cutting, you will certainly be dissatisfied with the results. And this will not be merely on account of the amateurishness of the work. The best figures by the best workmen will give you something of the same feeling. Animal forms to a certain extent may be introduced—birds are very beautiful, and you will certainly wish to carve them. The hybrid forms, which furnished the element of the grotesque in old-world and mediæval carving, were effective, though it is difficult to see that they have anything to say to the decoration of American houses. But in the human figure in wood there is always something unsatisfying. The marble bust looks alive. The little groups of terra-cotta in the windows will be your despair. You need not be always saying to yourself, “This is terra-cotta.” They are

little brown men and women with keenly lined faces, and alive—alive to the ends of their fingers. But the face carved in wood will keep saying over and over, “I am mahogany. It was a great deal of work to carve me.”

In that wonderful journal of the Countess Irma, in “On the Heights,” the German novelist expresses this very clearly. The Countess carved in wood, the reader will remember, and it was when she was trying to give the expression of lithe springing life to the little wood chamois under her tool that she said:

“Wood is useful for so many purposes, and is so necessary, that it will not allow itself to be applied to free, independent beauty. As a material for any art or rather for any handicraft, it must ever remain inadequate, and can only appear for decorative purposes. Bronze and marble speak the universal language. A carving in wood has in it something provincial; it always speaks in dialect, and never comes to the full, transparent expression of the highest idea. Wood-cutting is only the beginning of the art. It remains faltering in its expression. Whatever has once had an organic appearance, as a tree, cannot be transformed into an artificial organic structure.”



FIG. 2. USE OF THE CHISEL IN WOOD-CARVING.

For our American household carving, then, let us draw on the endless variety of American plant forms and foliage for designs; and while we take every opportunity of studying the best models, beware of a slavish imitation of that which has no place in an American scheme of decoration. For your natural designs, study plants. Learn their tricks and their manners—their “pretty ways of growing.” Choose leaves and flowers with a good deal of “outline.” Single flowers are better than double, and one soon learns to go to weeds and wild flowers for an individuality that one cannot find in the greenhouse. Perhaps it is that cultivated flowers, like cultivated people, are very much alike.

As the cutting of a conventional design requires only accuracy, it is good material for a first lesson. Take the design in Fig. 1, a simple band of bevelled points, leaving a row of uncut diamonds in the centre. Have your panel of well-seasoned wood. There is nothing better than black walnut, but of course other wood will answer. The softness of pine tempts a beginner—but it is too soft, splits easily and works rough. Clamp your panel to the bench. For laying off conventional designs you will need a rule—a steel “straight edge” such as carpenters use is best—and

a pair of compasses. Get those that can be set by a thumb-screw. An adjustable bevel, which can be bought at any hardware store, will be useful in laying off the diagonal lines. Lay off the design making the diamonds not less than an inch square. A blue pencil is best for drawing on wood.

You are ready now to cut the bevelled points. Take the chisel No. 1, and holding it straight, and setting it at the inside point of the bevel, cut straight down to an equal depth on each side, sloping to the outside edge. Then holding the chisel in the position shown in Fig. 2, cut from the outside edge down to the centre. To cut the point clean, use your narrow bevelled chisel. Always work with the bevelled side of the chisel down, and be careful to hold it flat on this bevel. Otherwise you will wear it off round. Try to cut with a firm, even stroke. One cut is better than two, if it will do the work. Don't worry the wood. Any other simple design may be drawn on the same panel. The first object is to get control of the tool and learn the management of the wood.

CALISTA H. PATCHIN.

IN advertising a new kind of artificial leather to the furniture trade, a Boston company says: “It is manifestly to the advantage of furniture manufacturers and upholsterers to use a material that cheapens the cost of production, while taking nothing from the looks or style of a job.” So long as the sham *looks* like the genuine article, it is apparently assumed by the producer that the honest retailer can have no compunction in foisting it upon his customer. The public may take a hint from this.

CEILINGS of rooms in the home, a writer in The London Furniture Gazette urges, should be decorated with color, as well as, or more than, the walls. “Dark ceilings,” he says, “give a cosy effect to a room. In old England the ceilings of rooms were colored as commonly as the walls, and our forefathers would have thought it as strange to leave the ceilings white as to whiten the doors or the walls, and to color everything else in the room. To this day we find deep blue ceilings in some of the houses in outlying districts, where change and fashion are alike unknown.”

